

November 5, 2009

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF  
THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND  
ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The Torrance Environmental Quality and Energy Conservation Commission convened in a regular session at 7:05 p.m. on Thursday, November 5, 2009 in the West Annex meeting room at Torrance City Hall.

**2. ROLL CALL:**

Present: Commissioners Chim, Gobble, Griffiths, Reilly, Watson, and Chairperson McCabe.

Absent: None.

Also Present: Deputy Community Development Director Cessna and Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan.

**3. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Reilly.

**4. POSTING OF THE AGENDA**

**MOTION:** Commissioner Chim, seconded by Commissioner Watson, moved to accept and file the report of the secretary on the posting of the agenda for this meeting; a voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

**5. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

None.

**6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**6A. MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 3, 2009**

**MOTION:** Commissioner Gobble moved for the approval of the September 3, 2009 meeting minutes as submitted. Commissioner Reilly seconded the motion; a voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

**7. ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS**

**7A. GREEN PRIDE IN TORRANCE AWARD FOR CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT GARDENS**

Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan presented Green Pride in Torrance awards for California native plant gardens in the City. Roy Nitzchner accepted the

award for 1752 Andreo Avenue and Fern Ruiz received the award for 1404 Engracia Avenue. Rory and Kristie Lanktree were not present to accept the award for their garden at 1537 Marcelina Avenue.

Deputy Director Cessna announced that Green Pride in Torrance award winners will be recognized at the December 15, 2009 City Council meeting.

Chairperson McCabe expressed appreciation to tonight's recipients and suggested that they be included in the March 2010 Environmental Fair.

The Commission was in a brief recess from 7:12 p.m. to 7:20 p.m. for a photo opportunity.

#### **7B. SOLAR PANEL PERMITTING FEES**

Deputy Director Cessna provided background and presented potential recommendations that were suggested at the October Commission meeting: 1) Waive fees for residential solar installations, perhaps with a time limit that could then be extended if desired, 2) Consolidate permitting process and have all solar plan check performed by Building staff, 3) Provide information sheets regarding installation requirements, 4) Preferred provider list such as in Santa Monica, and 5) Pre-approved installation methods that could be issued over the counter. She noted that there were eight residential solar installations in 2008 and 22 in 2009. She recommended that the Commission forward the first three recommendations to City Council, recommend working on partnering with the South Bay Energy Savings Center (SBESC) for provider listings, and working with Building and Safety as well as Fire to come up with installation method recommendations.

In response to Commissioner Chim's inquiry, she stated that permit fees average \$250 for residential solar panel installation and that the Fire Department charges a \$240 flat plan check fee for both residential and commercial installations. She added that staff has suggested to the Fire Department that they charge a smaller fee for residential solar installation.

Commissioner Reilly expressed concern that there may be a surge in installation applications and potential loss of revenue for the City. She suggested waiving fees based on quantity rather than time; for example, waiving fees for the first 50 or 100 applications.

Responding to Commissioner Griffiths' inquiry, Deputy Director Cessna stated that permits can be processed over the counter or take up to two days to process. She added that Fire Department plan checks take approximately two weeks but that Building and Safety staff are more than capable of checking roof strength, distance from the ridge, and other things that the Fire Department looks for in residential installations.

Commissioner Gobble expressed support for providing a "preferred provider" list to assist residents and Deputy Director Cessna advised that the City prefers not to go in that direction due to the potential for liability if there are problems between installer and resident as well as staff time required to determine who would be on the list. She recommended referring applicants to the SBESC website that provides a list of installers.

Commissioner Watson described the services offered in the City of Santa Monica, pointing out that it is a very intense process and for a much smaller population.

Commissioner Griffiths voiced support for waiving permit fees, noting that this is a great opportunity to make a strong statement that the City is environmentally friendly.

Commissioner Gobble suggested offering a fee reduction in 2010, from the current approximately \$500 to \$200, and revisiting again at the end of 2010.

Commissioner Chim suggested the possibility of using a combination of both Commissioner Reilly's and Commissioner Gobble's recommendations.

Chairperson McCabe stated that SBESC should provide a list of "green" vendors such as the City of Santa Monica does and voiced support for very low or completely waived fees to encourage residents.

Referring to the second recommendation to consolidate the permitting process, Commissioner Gobble discussed Southern California Edison's plan check process and stated that he supports having all solar plan checks performed by Building staff.

Commissioner Griffiths stated that the Fire Department's involvement in plan checks is duplicative and that it makes sense to consolidate the permitting process.

In response to Chairperson McCabe's inquiry, Deputy Director Cessna discussed Assembly Bill 811 that will encourage all kinds of energy savings by giving residents money up front and allowing them to repay over a number of years through their property tax.

Commissioner Watson stressed the importance of making the process simple, free, and streamlined.

Commissioners discussed recommendation #3 that would provide information sheets regarding installation requirements.

Commissioner Gobble stated that he supports the recommendation but noted that information sheets need to be clear, provided in advance of installations, and professionally developed to ensure that requirements are met.

Deputy Director Cessna stated that recommendation #3 would provide general information sheets but that recommendation #5 would provide actual diagrams. She added that solar vendors apply for the majority of permits.

Commissioner Chim cautioned that there may be disputes between neighbors over right to light and air issues and that the City should have a plan in place to address this before the recommendations go into effect.

Deputy Director Cessna stated that the City Attorney's Office is aware of this potential but that there is no case law yet.

Commissioner Gobble concurred with Commissioner Chim and raised the possibility of recommending that solar panels be no more than six inches over a ridge line.

Commissioner Reilly suggested that recommendation #5 be included with recommendation #3 and staff concurred.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Gobble moved to adopt the five recommendations but with recommendation #1 to state that fees for residential solar installations be \$100 for a period of one year and to expire December 31, 2010 with no limit, that recommendations 2, 3, and 5 be combined together, and that staff would utilize the preferred provider list used by the South Bay Energy Savings Center for recommendation #4. The motion failed due to a lack of a second.

Deputy Director Cessna advised Commissioners that they could present a range of options to City Council in the item.

Commissioner Gobble stated that a minimal fee would get applicants in the door and would not limit solar panel installations.

Commissioner Griffiths stated his opinion that fees should be completely waived for 12 months from the date of approval but that permits should still be required.

Commissioner Chim stated that she liked the suggestion to give City Council several options, but added that they may be more comfortable with concrete numbers.

Commissioner Reilly stated that her only concern was the potential cost to the City if there is a large increase in applications, agreeing that permits should be required. She suggested waiving fees for the first 50 applicants and \$100 thereafter.

Commissioner Watson and Chairperson McCabe recommended waiving fees for 12 months and reviewing the fee structure at the end of the period.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Gobble moved to recommend to City Council to 1) waive solar permitting fees for the first 50 applicants and a \$100 fee for all other applicants for the remainder of the 12 month period beginning the date of approval, 2) to review the fee structure at the end of the 12 month period, 3) to consolidate the permitting process and have all solar plan checks performed by Building staff, 4) to provide information sheets and pre-approved installation methods over the counter, 5) to utilize the list of preferred vendors provided by the South Bay Energy Savings Center, and 6) with the understanding that other options discussed at this meeting will also be presented to City Council. Commissioner Chim seconded the motion. The motion passed by a 5-1 roll call vote (with Commissioner Griffiths voting nay).

Commissioner Griffiths explained that he voted against the motion because he supports waiving all fees and believes that recommendation #4 should be completely eliminated.

#### **7C. TEQECC ANNUAL REPORT 2008-2009**

Deputy Director Cessna noted that the Commission's Annual Report for 2008-2009 was included in agenda materials.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Gobble moved to accept as presented the Annual Report for the Environmental Quality and Energy Conservation Commission for 2008-2009. Commissioner Watson seconded the motion; a voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

## **8. ORAL COMMUNICATION**

**8A.** Commissioner Chim raised the possibility of shortening the name of the Commission and Deputy Director Cessna offered to forward the suggestion to the Ad Hoc Council Committee for Commission Review.

**8B.** Deputy Director Cessna announced a Proclamation for "A Day Without Bags" at the December 15, 2009 City Council meeting as well as recognition of coloring contest winners, the Commission's Annual Report, and Green Pride in Torrance award winners.

**8C.** Deputy Director Cessna stated that "Save the Date" letters were sent out to vendors for the March 27, 2010 Environmental Fair and that they are starting to get feedback.

**8D.** Deputy Director Cessna stated that she is working with Jackie Decker's family to incorporate a tree planting in her honor at the March 27, 2010 Environmental Fair at Madrona Marsh Preserve.

**8E.** Deputy Director Cessna stated that she hopes to bring the carbon footprint report to the December 2009 Commission meeting.

**8F.** Deputy Director Cessna briefly discussed the SBESC meeting on October 23, 2009.

**8G.** Fred Koch, Via Ventura, urged the City to take advantage of stimulus funds that may be available for green building at the local level. He mentioned that Public Works provides a list of contractors and suggested that there be consistency.

In response to his inquiry, Deputy Director Cessna stated that the City has not established criteria for green building but has adopted Build it Green as a voluntary program for residential building and remodeling.

**8H.** Commissioner Gobble distributed information about innovative construction techniques for concrete, walls, carbon, and solar applications.

**8I.** Commissioner Chim shared information about her tour of the energy efficient Coca Cola plant in Torrance and the several environmentally geared vendors at the Women's Conference in the City of Long Beach.

**8J.** Commissioner Reilly announced that Exxon Mobil refinery is giving \$80,000 to North Torrance Library in celebration of their 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**8K.** Commissioner Reilly discussed the 360 video and “real time” demonstration of energy consumption of buildings at the SBESC meeting on October 23, 2009.

**8L.** Commissioner Reilly stated that she is maintaining the “back burner” list for the Commission to continue to monitor.

**8M.** Commissioner Watson received clarification from staff that some positive feedback was received from the Environmental Fair vendor survey.

**8N.** Commissioner Watson shared information about the billboard controversy in the City of Los Angeles.

**8O.** In response to Chairperson McCabe’s inquiry, Commissioner Reilly stated that the solar subcommittee decided to defer the solar co-op proposal and to focus more on promoting AB811.

**8P.** Responding to Chairperson McCabe’s inquiry, Deputy Director Cessna stated that she has not confirmed a date for the joint meeting with City Council yet.

**8Q.** Chairperson McCabe stated that he was misquoted in the ad hoc Council Committee for Commission Review meeting minutes. He stated that he actually recommended that some of the items be taken away from the Commission that do not fall in line with environmental quality and energy conservation.

**8R.** Chairperson McCabe stated that the City of El Segundo is accepting green waste if residents want to drop it off.

**8S.** Commissioner Gobble requested an excused absence for the December 3, 2009 Commission meeting.

## **9. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** At 9:10 p.m., Commissioner Griffiths moved to adjourn the meeting to December 3, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. in the West Annex meeting room. Commissioner Watson seconded the motion and, hearing no objection, Chairperson McCabe so ordered.

Approved as Amended January 7, 2010 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
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